

Senate Unit Says Scheme Rejected

U.S. Weighed Murder of Diem

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The United States considered the assassination of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, but it was rejected in a high-level decision, the Senate intelligence committee disclosed yesterday.

Senate investigators are still attempting to determine whether there was indirect American involvement or encouragement when Diem was slain.

Diem and his brother, South Vietnamese secret police Chief Ngo Dinh Nhu, were killed on Nov. 2, 1963, after a military coup in Saigon led by Maj. Gen. Duong Van (Big) Minh.

Acting Committee Chairman

John G. Tower (R-Tex.) told reporters that "we have no indication at this moment that there was any direct American involvement in the assassination of Diem," but he said more witnesses would have to be called before any findings could be made on the question of indirect complicity.

"I think it's very obvious from what's already been printed that there was some American interest in the plot to overthrow the Diem government, but I think I cannot go beyond that," Tower said.

He spoke after a closed session yesterday morning with Central Intelligence Agency Director William E. Colby who, Tower said, testified "rather extensively and, I think, very constructively."

The committee met yesterday afternoon with former CIA official Lucien Conein, who was a principal agency contact man in Saigon with the generals who carried out the 1963 coup.

Conein retired from the CIA in 1968, and is now an official with the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Tower confirmed that Diem's assassination was considered by U. S. officials, but he said it was clear from "the evidence before us now" that the notion was rejected at "high levels." He would not elaborate.

"The fact of the matter is there was no direct American involvement in the assassination, and American involve-

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ment was specifically rejected at high levels as a means of implementing national policy," Tower said. He declined to go into details when asked who

had presented or endorsed the proposal.

Tower said that former U. S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who may have been the last American to talk with Diem before his death, also might be called as a witness.

Speaking of the coup against the Diem regime, as distinct from his assassination, Tower said: "We don't have all of the evidence in yet on that. We still have witnesses yet to be heard, and I think it would be wrong to jump to any conclusions at this moment."

According to a cable from Lodge to Washington that was contained in the Pentagon Papers, Conein met with Minh

on Oct. 5, 1963, and reported Minh's listing three ways of getting rid of Diem and his brother—with the easiest way being assassination.

Minh subsequently called the report a "big lie" and insisted that "no one wanted them killed."

Later, however, it was re-

ported that 17 generals and colonels of the South Vietnamese army, including Minh, voted to kill Diem. In a December, 1971, NBC program, Conein said he tried to get Diem out of the country, and asked the U. S. embassy for a plane, but was told he would have to wait 24 hours for it.